

Officials: Montgomery IG being pressured by Leggett

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Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett's administration is trying to hamper the reform efforts of independent watchdogs and whistleblowers, according to county officials.

Inspector General Thomas Dagley told a County Council audit committee Tuesday that there is "mounting evidence" that there has been "outside interference" with his work for almost a year.

Leggett's spokesman, Patrick Lacefield, denied that there has been any pressure exerted on Dagley's office, but said there had been disagreements about the accuracy of Dagley's work and the procedures he follows in releasing reports.

Lacefield also noted that Leggett was the lead sponsor of legislation to establish an inspector general's office when he sat on the County Council.

"There is an inspector general because of Ike Leggett," Lacefield said.

Dagley did not go into specifics about what kind of pressure his office was under and who was responsible, saying that information might be better aired in private to council members. But he mentioned three recent, high-profile investigations in which he feels there has been undue outside influence, including:

» An investigation into the county's embattled tuition assistance program, which *The Examiner* first reported is being probed by federal investigators. The county is suing a police officer who allegedly used more than \$400,000 in taxpayers' money to sell guns at steep discounts to more than 200 police officers and prison guards. The allegations came to light last summer; the county filed its lawsuit two weeks ago — just days before a highly critical report was released by Dagley.

» An investigation into the county's handling of an investigation of a former assistant county fire chief who caused a four-car pileup while driving drunk in a county vehicle. Two senior police officers are suing to keep copies of an internal police investigation that cleared the officers of any wrongdoing from being given to Dagley.

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» An investigation into the county Department of Health and Human Services' payments to a child care center for low-income Hispanic immigrants that Dagley said were open to fraud, waste and abuse.

Council Vice President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring, said she has been concerned for some time about undue pressure and retaliation aimed at the inspector general's office and whistleblowers. She said those concerns prompted her to push for legislation that allows the IG's office outside legal counsel and protects county officials and contract workers who expose fraud.

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